

# City targets own lawyers in case

By Gene C. Johnson Jr.  
Special to Sentinel-Voice

INGLEWOOD, Calif. (NNPA) - The city is suing a law firm that represented it in a civil lawsuit in which it paid out \$2.4 million to ex-Inglewood Police Officer Jeremy Morse and active officer Bijan Darvish, known for their roles in the brutal July 2002 arrest of teenager Donovan Jackson.

Lawyers for Morse and Darvish convinced a jury that the two officers were discriminated against for their roles in the videotaped arrest of Jackson, which drew worldwide criticism. Morse and Darvish filed their lawsuit in February 2003 and were subsequently awarded \$1.6 million and \$811,000, respectively.

The City Council on May 2 approved an agreement with the law firm Blecher and Collins on a contingency basis to sue the law firm Jones and Mayer, which defended the city in the civil suit.

The law firm "allegedly fell below the standard of care in their representation of the city," said City Attorney Anita C. Willis. "It's a professional liability claim."

Willis explained, "We're concerned about the verdict and the outcome of the case. We believe that there were some things that should have happened differently. This case is in litigation so I'm not going into the details of this case. It's on a contingency basis. We don't pay any attorney fees unless we win."

The legal malpractice lawsuit was filed Jan. 12 in Los Angeles County Superior Court before being transferred April 24 to the Orange County Superior Court.

Still, according to a memo from Willis' office to the City Council, "The city will be responsible for all out-of-pocket expenses associated with the matters. If the city is unsuccessful, the law firm will not collect a fee. Funds in the amount of \$50,000 will be included in the agreement to cover any costs, such as expert witness fees, etc."

Specifically, the lawsuit is against Paul Coble, a lawyer with Jones and Mayer. Coble referred all calls to the attorneys representing him, Gregory Halliday and Frederick Hayes, who said: "Our policy is not to discuss active litigation. It's a firm policy."

In their lawsuit, Morse and Darvish claimed that a Black officer, Willie Crook, who struck then-16-year-old Jackson off-camera, was treated differently because he is Black.

During the July 6, 2002, videotaped arrest at an Inglewood gas station Morse was seen slamming Jackson against a patrol car after his father, Coby Chavis, was detained during a routine traffic stop.

The jury's decision fell in line with an arbitrator's February 2004 ruling that exonerated Darvish and recommended that the city pay him back wages for his 10-day suspension.

A subsequent investigation revealed that Crook also had struck Jackson with a flashlight. In a January 2005 interview, Mayor Roosevelt Dorn confirmed that Crook lost his job as a police officer and was reassigned as a civilian jailer.

Morse was charged with assault under the color of authority. Darvish was accused of filing a false police report about the incident. Both charges carried possible three-year prison sentences.

Morse was fired from the police department in October 2002 and Darvish was disciplined for his role in Jackson's arrest, said then-Inglewood Police Chief Ronald Banks.

In July 2003, a Superior Court judge declared a mistrial after being notified by the jury foreman that the jurors, after three days of deliberations, were hopelessly deadlocked. According to the foreman's statement, seven jurors favored finding Morse guilty on the charge of felony assault under the color of authority while five believed him to be innocent. Darvish, who was present during the incident, was found not guilty of filing a false police report.

A second trial in January 2004 resulted in a similar outcome.

Jackson subsequently sued the city of Inglewood and Los Angeles County in federal court, a case that was eventually settled. Chavis, in filing a civil lawsuit against the city of Inglewood in the Los Angeles County Superior Court, also received a settlement.

Jackson reportedly reached a tentative settlement with the city for \$500,000. Chavis reportedly had a tentative agreement to settle for \$150,000.

Gene C. Johnson Jr. writes for the Wave Community Newspapers.



## SMILE

Sentinel-Voice publisher Ramon Savoy, middle, joins Verila Hoggard-Davis, left, and Marcia Washington, right, for a picture during the Southern Nevada Coalition of Concerned Women's awards luncheon Saturday at the Monte Carlo. Rep. Maxine Waters, D-Calif., keynoted the event. Local high seniors also received college scholarships.

Sentinel-Voice photo by Kathi Overstreet

# Black chief to lead Salvation Army

NEW YORK (AP) - The Salvation Army is poised to install a Black leader for its U.S. operations Friday, the first time a Black church official has led the predominantly White, evangelical denomination in this country.

Commissioner Israel L. Gaither will become the commander of the Army in the United States at a ceremony featuring brass band and choral flourishes.

Few Blacks have served as the top officials of majority White U.S. religious bodies. Other examples include Archbishop Wilton Gregory, former president of the Roman Catholic bishops' conference, and the Rev. William Sinkford, current president of the Unitarian Universalist Association.

Gaither downplays any racial aspect in his choice by General Shaw Clifton, the new world leader of the Army, a denomination famed for its social services. Clifton will preside at New York's Centennial Memorial Temple at the installations of Gaither and of his wife, Eva, as president of Women's Ministries. "I'm not here because of my color, and I wouldn't be here if I thought I was," Gaither said in an Associated Press interview. "I want to serve all men and women. I am aware I can serve as a model to African-Americans, as well as to Whites and Hispanics."

Eva is White and their 1967 interracial marriage was the first between American Army officers.

"I grew up at the edge of

the Civil Rights Era" and "there was a lot of Jim Crowism around, behind your back. You didn't see it, but you could feel it," Gaither recalled. He said the Army "disallowed" certain appointments early in his career "but we understood the times. We hope we were able personally to influence change."

Racial statistics aren't recorded but Gaither said Blacks are a very small percentage of U.S. members and "officers" (equivalent to clergy). Does the Army need more Black officers? "Yes. We could use more officers, period, and more African-Americans," Gaither said. "But this is not employment. It's a calling."

That's a major problem facing Gaither, 61, who reaches retirement age in five years. There are only 3,661 officers, down nearly one-third in the past five years.

Gaither attributes this to the Army's "high standards" and to secularization and materialism affecting all churches in the West.

The small, disciplined officer corps leads 422,543 church members (112,513 of them oath-bound "soldiers") and an extraordinary charity empire with 60,642 employees and 3.5 million volunteers that annually spends \$2.6 billion to aid Americans.

Another challenge is the Army's insistence that staffers uphold its beliefs, which includes limiting sex to man-woman marriage. A New York lawsuit is in process and some cities have ended Army contracts under pressure from gay activists.

Gaither says this hasn't hurt fundraising, which has hit record levels. "People trust the Salvation Army," he said. "We're going to obey the laws of the land. How-

ever, we will not give up our standards. We are rooted in biblical concepts," he said. "We want employees to understand our values and abide by them... we're not going to compromise."

He emphasized that in dispensing social services, the Army helps those in need without discrimination.

Though many officers are raised within the Army, Gaither was a Black Baptist preacher's son in New Castle, Pa. He had contemplated a clergy career before attending Army youth programs.

He became America's first Black divisional commander, in southern New England and western Pennsylvania, and first territorial commander, supervising Eastern states. He also commanded the Southern Africa territory, the first U.S. Black in such a post overseas.

- Pre-Registering for 2006 Classes
- Bi-Lingual (Spanish) Courses
- Excellent Placement Record - 92% Success Rate
- Financial Aid Available for Those Who Qualify
- Prepare for the Nevada State Exam

902 W. Owens | Las Vegas, NV 89106  
702-636-8686 | www.expertisebeauty.com

“After graduating from the Expertise Cosmetology Institute, I immediately landed the perfect opportunity at Hot Headz Salon... Money's great and my schedule is MY SCHEDULE. Thanks, Expertise”

—Ms. Kris, Las Vegas Class of 2002